

TO: D.C. State Board of Education Members  
FROM: SBOE Staff  
RE: **State Board COVID-19 Recovery Funds Survey Results**  
DATE: May 12, 2021

## Summary

District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) and public charter school principals and school leaders<sup>1</sup> from across the District responded to questions regarding their experiences supporting their schools during COVID-19, how federal funding helped and will continue to help their schools, and practices that they adopted and plan on continuing to turn to in years to come following their experiences leading schools during the pandemic.

## Key Takeaways

- Almost all of the public charter principals said they have received COVID-19 federal funds, compared to about a third of DCPS principals responding that they received these funds. Of those who received federal funds, most said they spent it on technology and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Most principals indicated they could not use the federal funds they received to hire more staff, with some indicating this was due to local education agency (LEA) policies.
- More than half of the public charter principals said they would consider reducing staff levels if they were not to receive federal aid, compared to less than half of DCPS principals.
- According to principals, the top two areas federal funds that can help their schools were staffing and SEL supports. Staffing was also the top way principals suggested they would spend their federal funding if they had no restrictions on how they spent the money.
- The length of time principals work at the same school seems to have an impact on how they would spend federal funding, with principals serving in schools for four or less years more likely to purchase social-emotional learning (SEL) supports compared to more veteran<sup>2</sup> principals who would spend it on staffing.
- Technology and staffing resources were most preferred option for planning into school years beyond the pandemic.
- Principals stated student attendance/engagement and/or clarity and guidance from leadership (i.e., the Deputy Mayor of Education, the Washington Teachers' Union, DCPS, etc.) were the most difficult challenges they faced during school year 2020-21. Guidance from leadership was most challenging for DCPS principals, although this was not the case for Ward 5, 6, and 8 principals or principals who worked for more than ten years at their schools.
- To address challenges they faced in school year 2020-21, most principals stated they engaged with their staff, families of their students, and/or the community at large; DCPS

---

<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, this memo will refer to the person responding to the survey as the "principal". We recognize that many schools use other titles like "Head of School" or "Executive Director".

<sup>2</sup> Veteran principals in this report are defined as serving for five (5) or more years in their career.



principals were more likely to indicate staff support while public charter principals were more likely to indicate family/community support.

- Virtual/hybrid learning components were among the top practices principals stated they used during the challenges of COVID-19 and intend to use beyond the pandemic.
- Mental/behavioral supports and high-dosage tutoring for students were the top-ranked resources being made available for summer 2021 and school 2021-22, while outdoor learning and faculty updates or maintenance were the least ranked resources.

### Methodology/Participant Information

On April 19, 2021, a 22-question SBOE COVID-19 Recovery Funds Survey was electronically distributed to DCPS and charter school principals across the District. Of the 39 DCPS and public charter school principals that responded to the survey (see Figures 1-4 in Appendix A for visual category breakdowns):

- 46 percent work at public charter schools, 53 percent serve in DCPS
- 62 percent are female, 35 percent male, 3 percent gender variant/non-conforming
- 14 percent identified themselves as Hispanic
- 57 percent identified themselves as white, 34 percent Black, 6 percent multi-racial, 3 percent Asian
- 24 percent have been a principal for less than four (4) years, 43 percent for 5–10 years, 32 percent for more than 10 years
- By Ward<sup>3</sup>:
  - Ward 1- Nine (9) principal respondents
  - Ward 2- Three (3) principal respondents
  - Ward 3- Six (6) principal respondents
  - Ward 4- Six (6) principal respondents
  - Ward 5- One (1) principal respondents
  - Ward 6- Two (2) principal respondent
  - Ward 7- Six (6) principal respondents
  - Ward 8- Four (4) principal respondents
  - Multiple Wards- Two (2) principal respondents

### Survey Results Analysis

The following analysis is based on themes from closed- or open-ended answer questions (as well as one ranking question), followed by comparisons across schools type (public charter schools and DCPS), the ward they work in, the length of time serving at the same school as a principal, and the total length of time serving as a principal in their education career.

**Almost all of the public charter principals (89 percent) claimed to have received COVID-19 federal funds, with about a tenth stating they may have received federal funds. DCPS principals, on the other hand, were about evenly split on whether they received funds, did not received**

<sup>3</sup> Note that not all District wards are represented equally by principals in this analysis, for example, there was only one principal respondent for Ward 5, therefore graphs in the Appendix below that show 100 percent for Ward 5 represents the single principals respondent for that ward in this report.



**funds, or may have received federal funds** (see Figure 5). Of the 23 principals who indicated they did receive federal funds, **most said they spent it on technology (60 percent) and PPE (56 percent).**

When asked **which needs principals were not able to address by spending federal funds associated with COVID-19 relief, most indicated hiring more staff (30 percent).** As to why they were unable to hire more staff, one public charter principal chose the survey option, *“DC law or regulation prevents the expense, Federal law, regulation, guidance prevents the expense,”* with eight DCPS principals agreeing with the option, *“LEA policy prevents the expense.”* **More than half of the public charter principals said they would consider reducing staff levels if they were not to receive federal aid, compared to less than half of DCPS principals.**

The top two **areas federal funds can help schools** with, according to principals, **were staffing and SEL supports.** While many indicating general staffing needs, a few respondents were more specific, describing needing more special education teachers, full time reading and math coaches, and counselors.

About **20 percent more public charter school principals compared to DCPS principals indicated they hope federal funds would help with school staffing in their schools** (see Figure 6). **SEL supports are more likely to be requested by principals serving four years or less at the same school, while principals serving five or more years are almost twice as likely to identify staffing needs for their schools** (see Figure 7).

**Without restrictions on how principals could spend federal funds, most stated spending on more staffing.** Five principals indicated spending funding on high-dosage tutoring. DCPS and public charter school principals indicated similar responses, but **Ward 2 principals (33 percent) were less likely to spend federal funds on staffing.** On the other hand, **the Ward 5 principal, over 80 percent of Ward 3 principals, and 75 percent of Ward 8 principals indicated a preference for additional staffing with unrestricted federal funding** (see Figure 8).

Among **COVID-related expenses principals wanted to see made permanent in the future of their school budgets, most indicated either technology, more staffing, or both.** DCPS and public charter school principals indicated similar responses. Ward 7 principals (17 percent) did not indicate as much of a need for more staffing compared to other principals, and all Ward 2<sup>4</sup> and 5 principals felt more staffing should become a permanent fixture following the pandemic. Ward 2 principals (33 percent) had the lowest numbers indicating technology as a COVID-related expense they would like to remain permanent, while all Wards 6 principals indicated their interest in technology as an included expense following the pandemic (see Figure 9).

As a note, one DCPS principal stated, *“This question is impossible to answer because the way the DCPS school budget process works, making something ‘permanent’ in the budget will only hurt principals in the long run. I’ve always found it strange that school leaders have to fight to get a*

<sup>4</sup> This runs counter to responses from Ward 2 principals who were less likely to indicate using federal funds to hire more staffing without restrictions.



*budget that meets students' needs. That is not true in other districts where I've worked. The [sic. Comprehensive Staffing Model] CSM is woefully inadequate as a method for shaping the budget. The CSM (at the high school level) does not establish teaching positions, assistant principals, or any of the KEY positions that are required to run schools. Instead, the CSM is created to give the appearance of autonomy, and to force the agenda of the varying agencies, departments and empires of DCPS central office on to schools. I wish central office would just create the entire budget themselves, since it is a futile act each year when I go through the motions of pretending that I am creating my own budget and each year I have impossible decisions to make. The budget process is the thing I like least about working for DCPS and when I eventually leave, I hope I get to explain in detail to someone that understands exactly how futile an endeavor it is."*

**Principals stated student attendance/engagement and/or clarity and guidance from leadership (i.e., the Deputy Mayor of Education, the Washington Teachers' Union, DCPS, etc.) made up the most difficult challenges they faced during school year 2020-21.** This is especially true for DCPS respondents for both areas; **twice as many DCPS principals indicated clarity/guidance from leadership** (see Figure 10). Student engagement/attendance was especially difficult to Wards 6 and 8, where all principals indicated this was a problem compared to all other wards, where half or less of principals indicated this was a significant challenge; at the same time **none of the Ward 5, 6, or 8 principals indicated challenges with clarity/guidance from education leadership** (see Figure 11). **None of the principals who served more than ten years at their school indicated clarity/guidance as one of their most difficult challenges at their schools** but were on par with other principals serving less than ten years when it came to challenges with student attendance/engagement (see Figure 12).

**To address challenges in school year 2020-21, most principals stated they engaged with their staff, families of their students, and/or the community at large. The inverse was true for DCPS and public charter schools in this area—double the number of principals indicated staff engagement as a major area of support during school year 2020-21; public charter school principals were twice as likely to point to some form of family or community engagement as their mode of support (see Figure 13).**

One veteran DCPS principals said, *"I relied on the [sic. assistant principal] AP, business manager, teacher leaders, and parents on our LSAT to support me in developing and implementing the reopening plans as well as seek feedback from staff and families each term on the best way forward."* A veteran public charter principals stated, *"Home visits, changing roles and responsibilities of our security team and front office staff to calling homes everyday throughout the day to make sure that scholars were logged in to class."* Another public charter principal with less than two years at their current school stated they used video calls with family members as their means of support to address the school year 2020-21 challenges.

**Virtual/hybrid learning components were among the top practices principals in the survey stated they used during the challenges of COVID-19 and intend to use beyond the pandemic,** with a little over half of DCPS principals agreeing with this. As one veteran DCPS principal stated, *"Many virtual meetings, like parent teacher conferences, Back to School Night, and college and career meetings are so much better virtually. Since families come from all 8 wards, eliminating*



*the travel/parking/work barrier is wonderful with virtual meetings, which can be accessed even with just a phone. Also, grade level meetings and presentations, assemblies, etc. are much easier to do with a link rather than meeting in the auditorium. We would also like to offer some classes virtually all the time. For instance, we wanted to offer AP European History, and we had a teacher that wanted to teach it, but only 5 students signed up so we didn't offer it. That might be a course that we could offer virtually all the time (like they do in college). I'm hoping we can continue some of these practices next year..."*

When asked to **rank types of resources being made available for summer 2021 and school 2021-22** (i.e., Establishing a Community School, Wrap Around Services for Families, High Dosage Tutoring, etc.), **the top ranked resource was mental/behavioral supports for students, followed by high dosage tutoring.** Showing **the least priority was outdoor learning and faculty updates or maintenance** (e.g., HVAC, classroom design, etc.) (see Figure 14: Heat Map of Ranked Priority Resources Being Made Available Going into Summer 2021 and School Year 2021-22).

When asked **what questions this survey should have asked principals**, a veteran DCPS principal with more than five years at their current school asked about the current budget formula and how equitably it applies to schools. They added that if they receive federal funds, they need to use them for gaps in what would normally be funded by their regular budget. This is echoed by another veteran DCPS principal, criticizing government agencies for inequities that result in a lack of support for public schools, Black students, or marginalized communities. A fairly new public charter school principal (2-4 years at her school and in their principal career) appreciated the support they received but suggested principals should be more included in considerations and timelines, pointing to adult schools receiving less funding than public K-12 schools; they also indicated that adult school principals are given notice of funding later than other schools, making budgeting challenging for them.

One veteran DCPS principal with less than two years at their current school suggested asking principals how they might make a reliable plan for school year 2021-22, adding that the stops and starts from this current school year proved challenging for her. A veteran public charter principal with more than ten years at their school added that the survey should have also asked what the District can do to help schools comply with the Mayor's mandate of opening schools 5-days per week while facility space may become a challenge.



## Appendix A: Survey Respondent Demographics

Figure 1: Breakdown of School Type

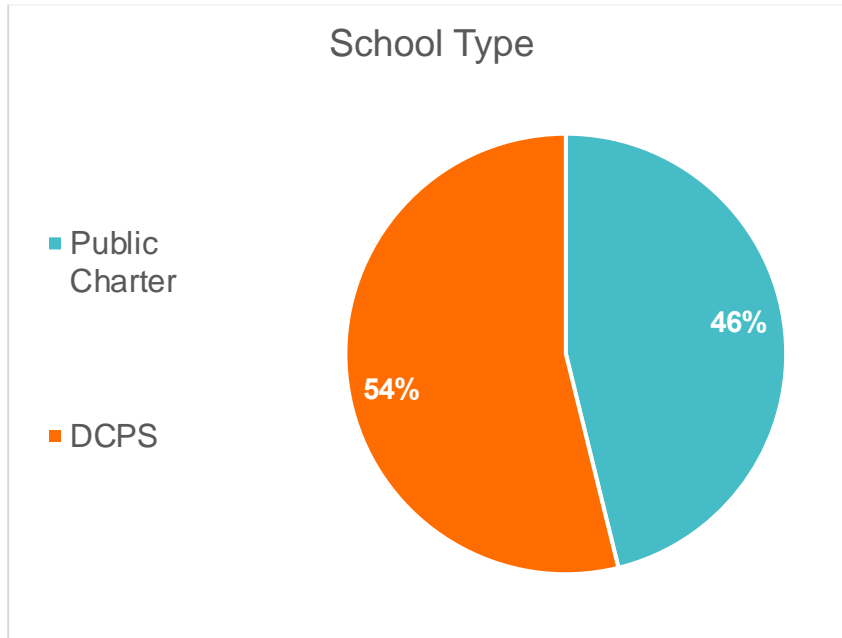


Figure 2: Breakdown by Ward

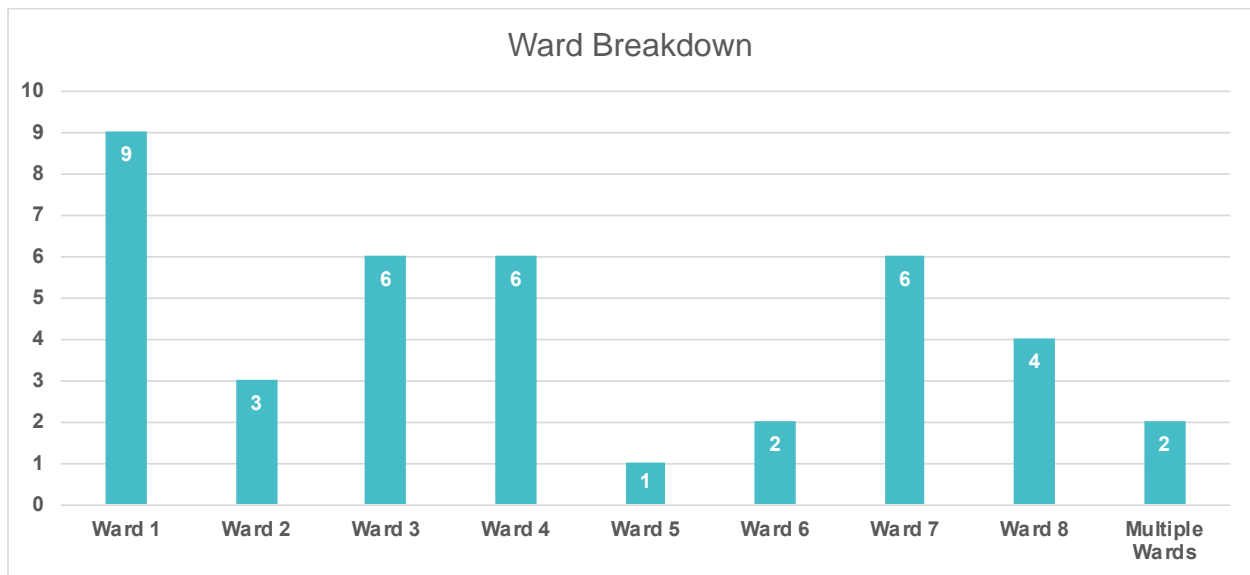


Figure 3: Breakdown of Principals by Years Serving at their Current School

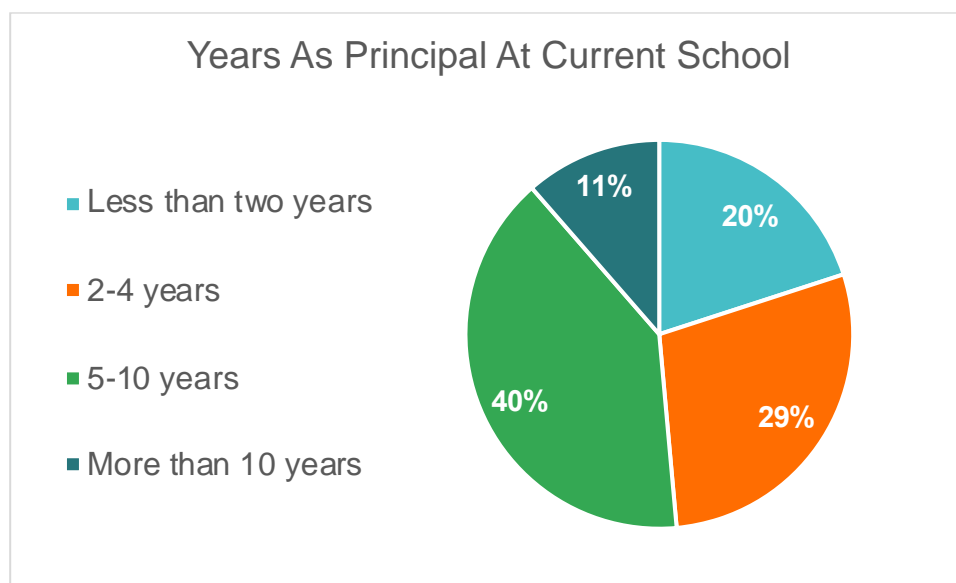
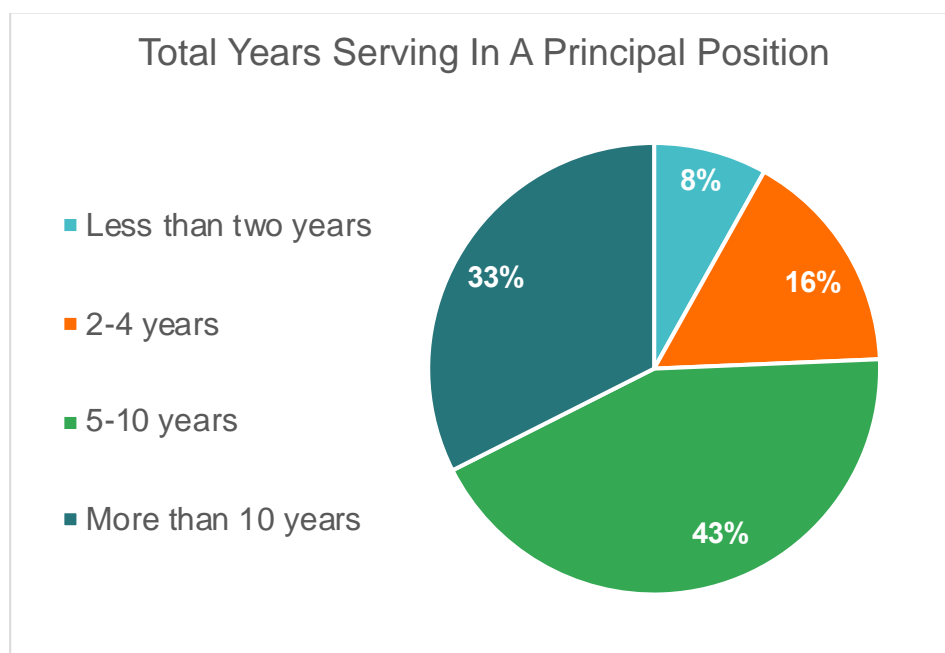


Figure 4: Breakdown of Principals by Total Years Serving at Any School





## Appendix B: Survey Response Analysis

Figure 5: Principal Responses to Whether They Received COVID-19 Related Funds by School Type

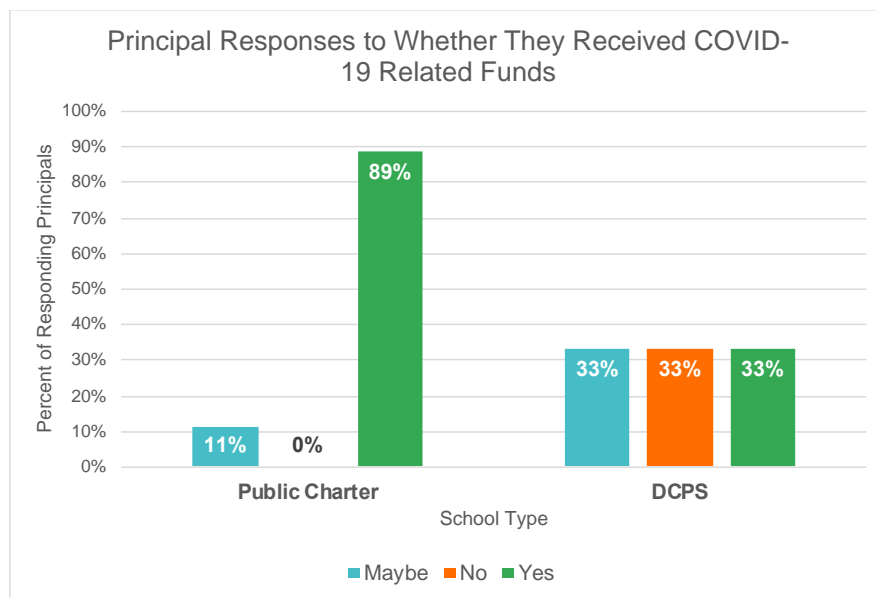


Figure 6: Supports Used to Address Challenges During School Year 2020-21 by School Type

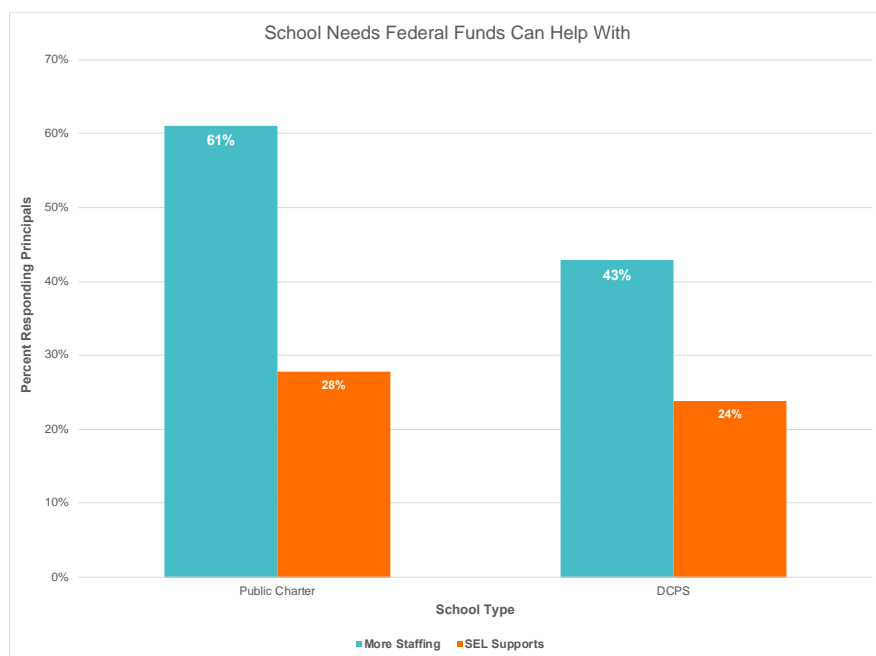




Figure 7: Needs Federal Funds Can Help with by Years Working At Same School

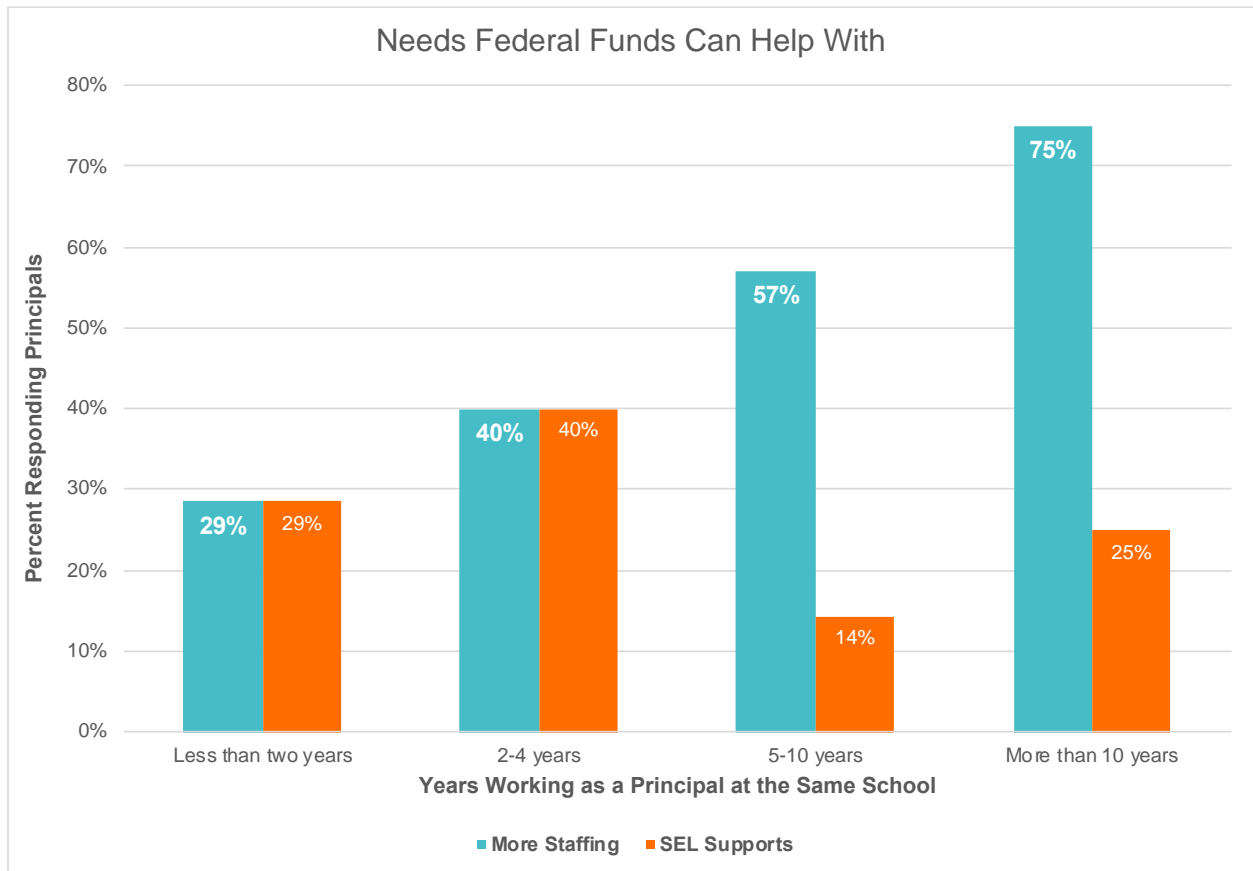


Figure 8: Ways Principals Would Spend Federal Funds Without Funding Restrictions by Ward

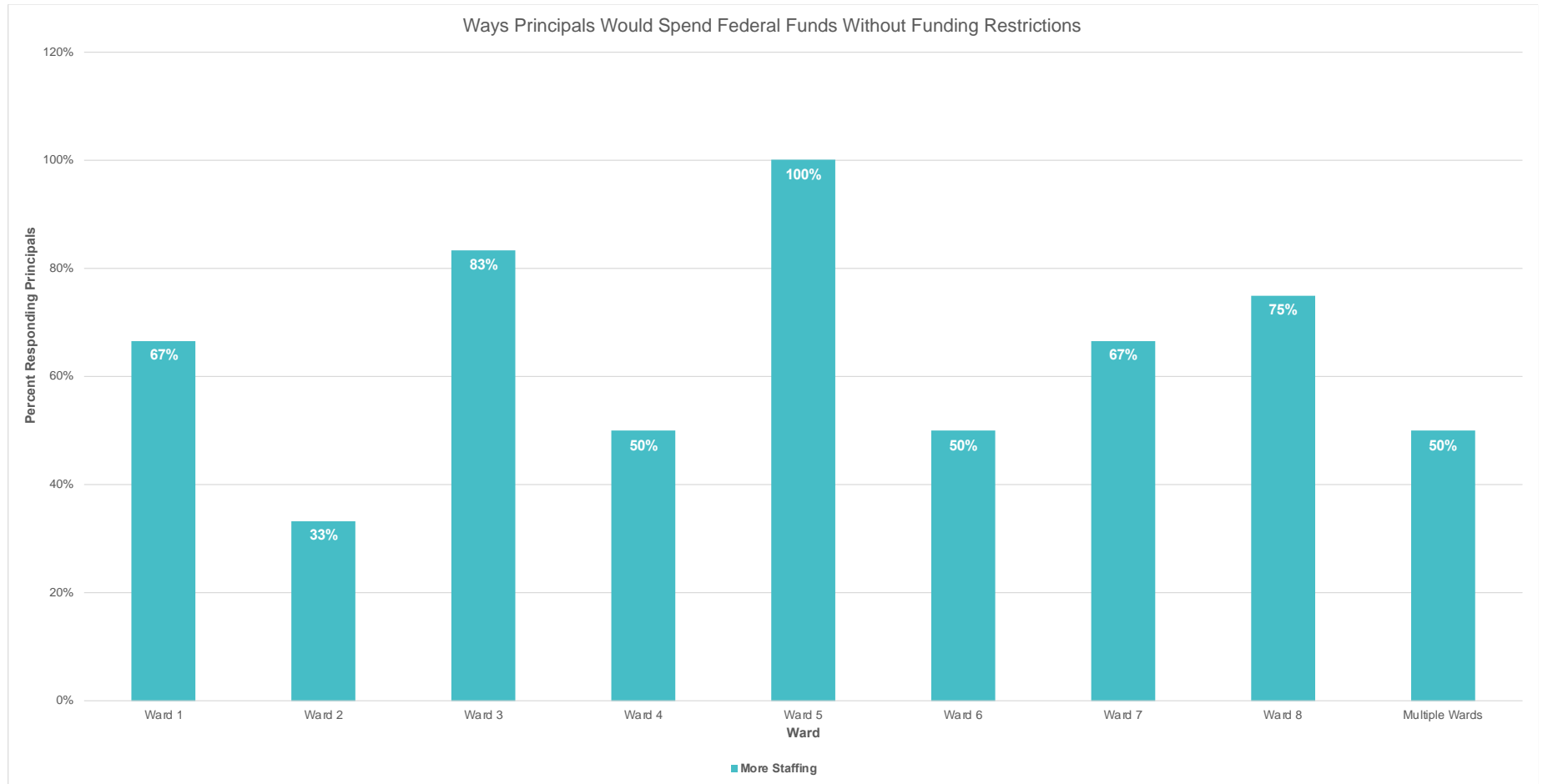


Figure 9: COVID-Related Expenses Principals Would Like to Make Permanent by Ward

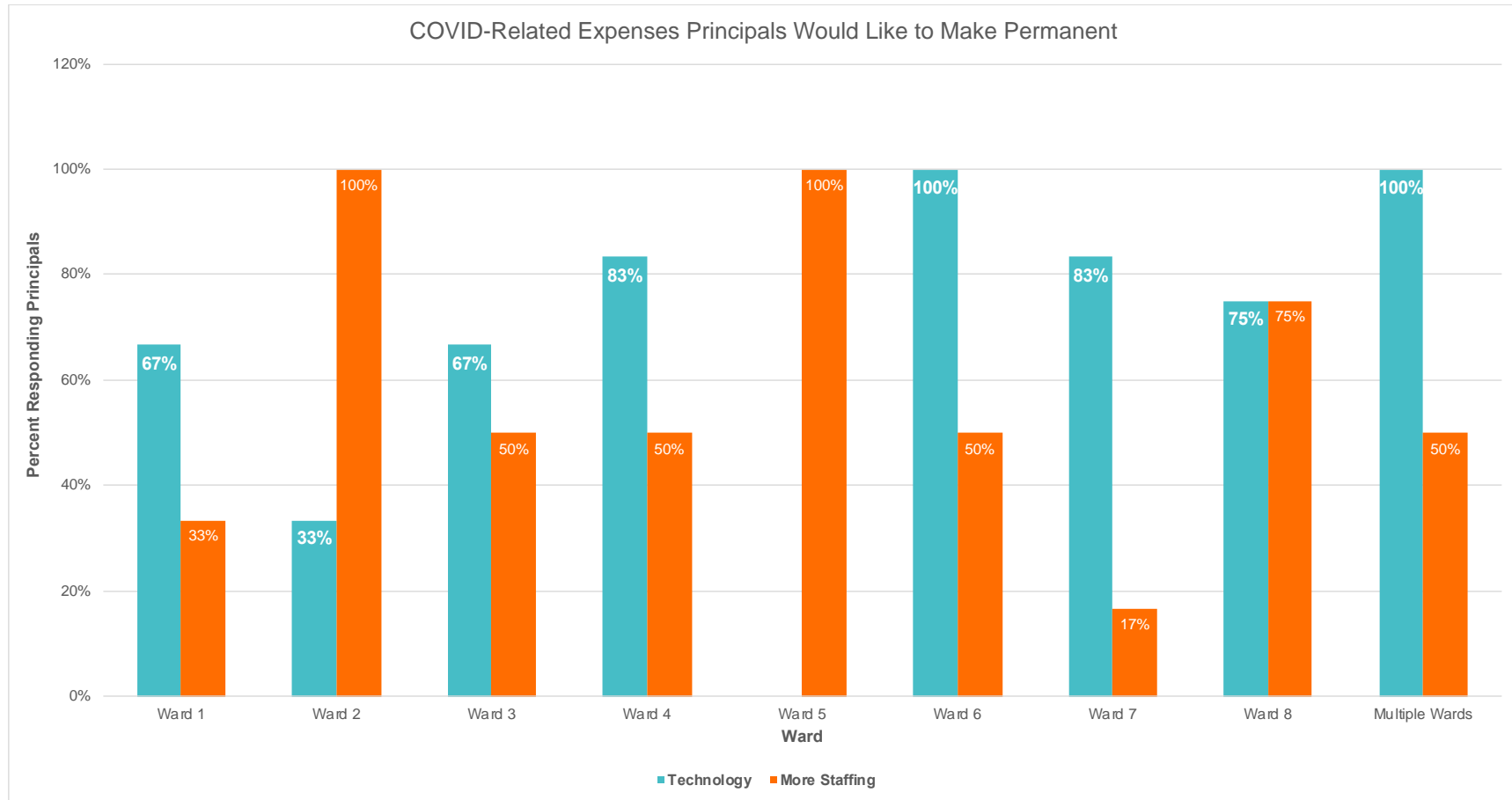


Figure 10: Most Difficult Challenges During School Year 2020-21 by School Type

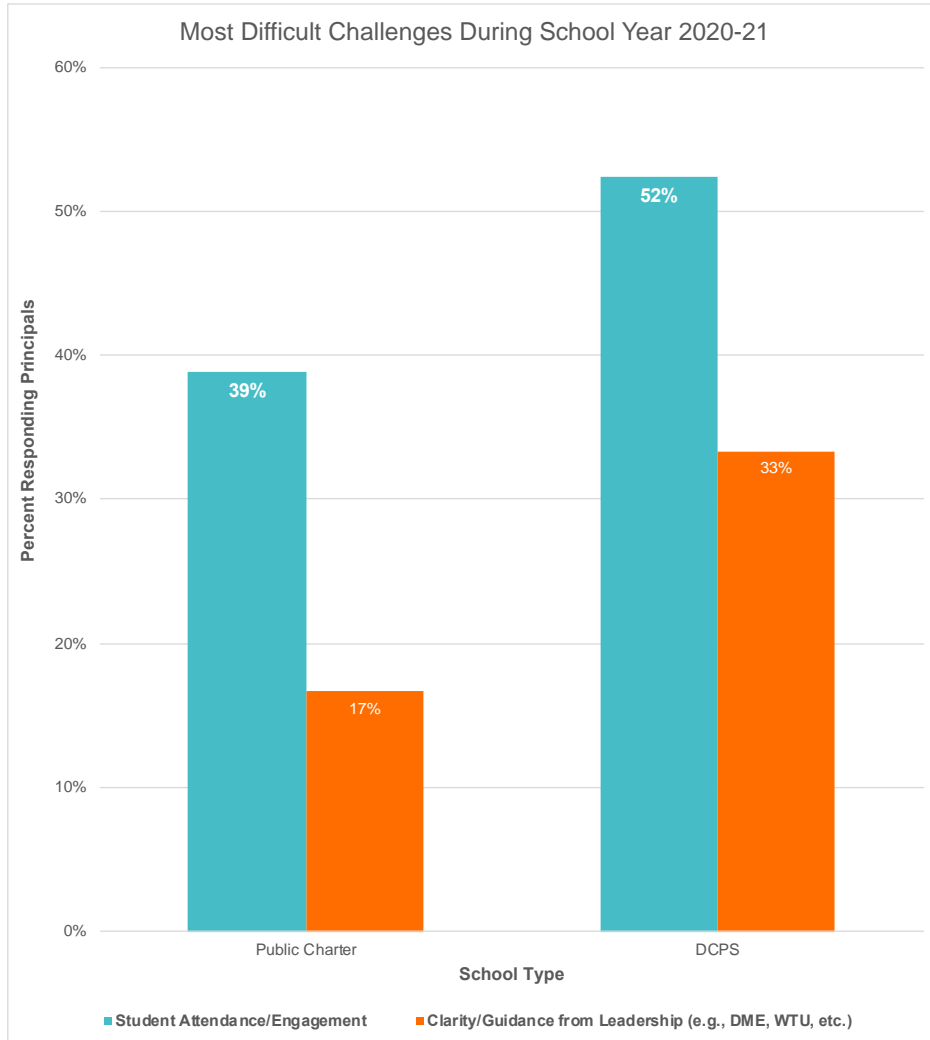


Figure 11: Most Difficult Challenges During School Year 2020-21 by Ward

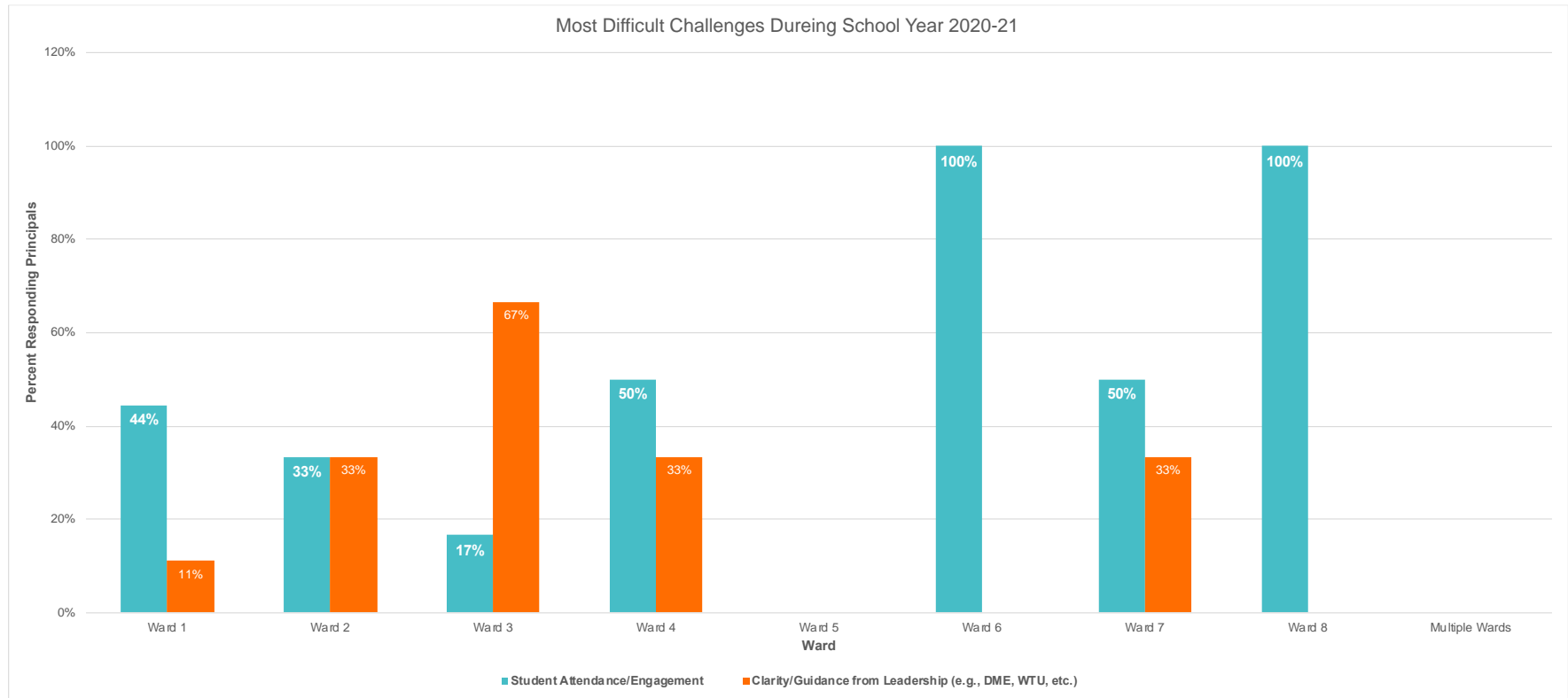
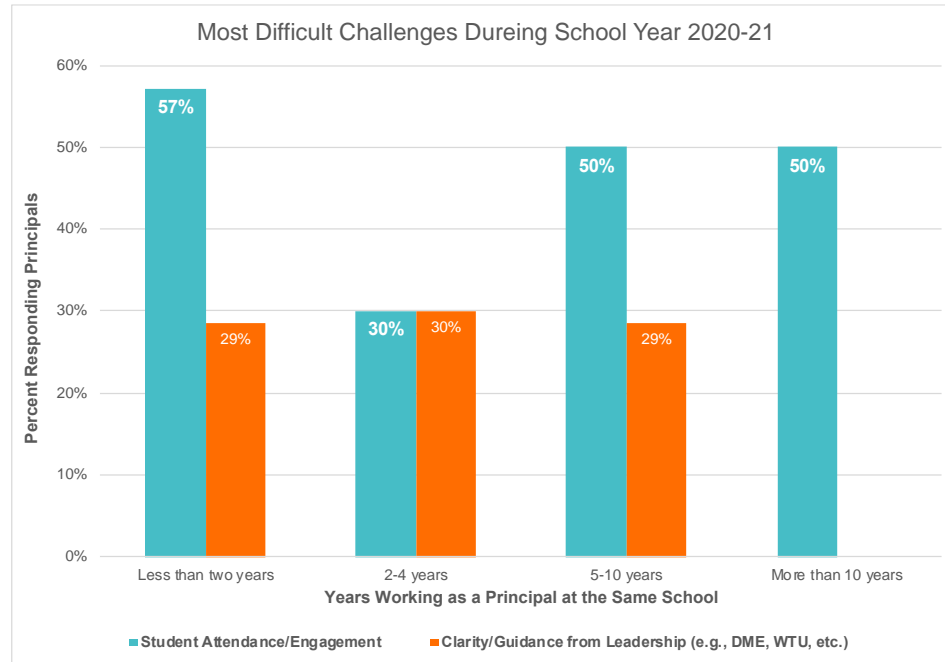




Figure 12: Most Difficult Challenges During School Year 2020-21 by Years Working at the Same School



*Figure 13: Supports Used to Address Challenges During School Year 2020-21 by School Type*

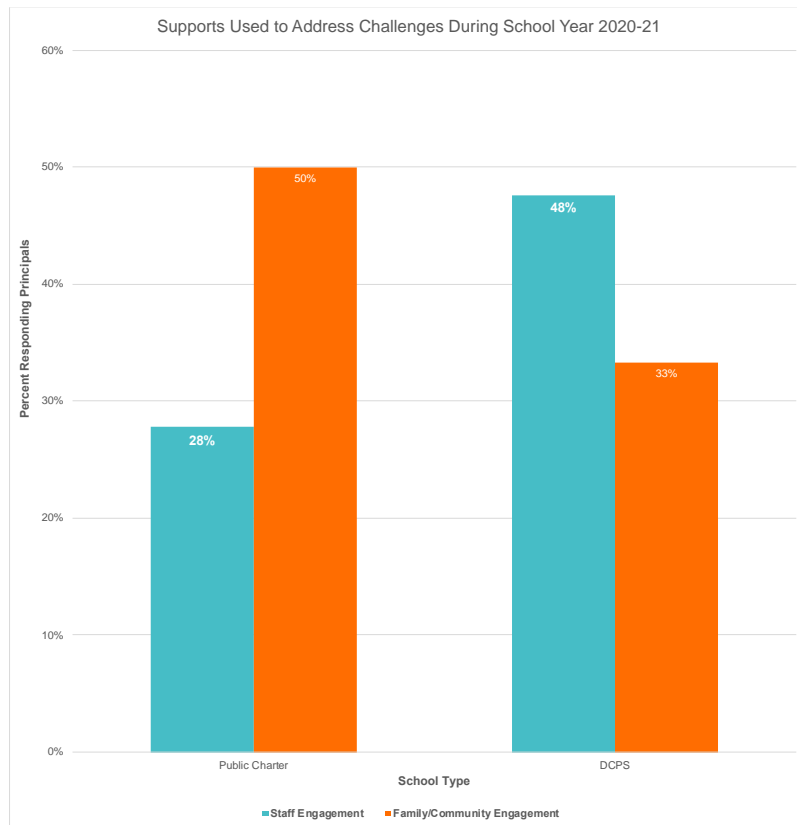




Figure 14: Heat Map of Ranked Priority Resources Being Made Available Going into Summer 2021 and School Year 2021-22

Summer 2021 and SY 2021-22 Priority Resources Category	Ranked 1 (Highest Priority)	Ranked 2	Ranked 3	Ranked 4	Ranked 5	Ranked 6	Ranked 7	Ranked 8	Ranked 9 (Lowest Priority)
High Dosage Tutoring	7	10	7	4	3	2	2	2	1
Mental/Behavioral Supports for Students	12	10	3	2	4	0	0	2	2
Mental/Behavioral Supports for Staff	3	1	7	7	4	7	4	4	0
Social & Emotional Learning Programming for Students	5	3	9	9	3	1	6	0	0
Social & Emotional Learning Programming for Teachers	0	1	0	6	12	11	3	2	0
Outdoor Learning	4	2	4	0	5	2	3	7	10
Establishing a Community School	2	5	2	3	0	2	8	8	1
Wrap Around Services for Families	3	2	5	5	3	7	8	3	0
Facility Updates or Maintenance (eg, HVAC, classroom redesign)	2	2	1	2	4	4	2	8	4
Other/Not Listed	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

